

# Dehydrated Much?

by Lt. Brad Owen


**P**icture yourself in the Persian Gulf, waiting to launch, and surprise, surprise, the temperature is pegged on your outside air temp gauge. This scene is ops normal for just about every air wing in WestPac these days. How many times have you felt tired, extremely thirsty, dizzy or slightly nauseated after sitting in a 100-degree cockpit on deck for an hour? As I climbed into the cockpit and sat there for what seemed like the ninetieth time for a turning spare during Operation Southern Watch this cruise, that feeling seemed all too familiar. We were under-way again after a four-day port visit in Jebel Ali. Not the best liberty on cruise, but one we'll always remember.

For one thing, I remember those shawarmas as if it were yesterday. This tasty little cross between a gyro and a burrito was delicious. Cheap, too, usually three for a dollar, perfect for the midnight munchies before we headed back aboard for another month. Unfortunately, the next few days produced the Middle Eastern equivalent of Montezuma's revenge. Diarrhea rampaged through the ready room. I wasn't spared, but when it came time to fly the next day, I felt OK. It was only an hour-and-fifteen-minute cycle, and I was only a spare. What could happen in that time?

We briefed, and after a quick trip to the head, we manned up. The temperature was 104 degrees

on the flight deck before we started some 30 jet engines, with a heat index around 120. It didn't take long for me to sweat through my flight suit. Once our canopy was closed, the temperature seemed to rise exponentially. The meager air flow from the Prowler air conditioner at idle rpm didn't help. It seemed an eternity for the "go" bird to call and tell us they were up. I felt parched even after two quarts of water.

We were shocked when our squadronmates called and told us we were to launch. We taxied out from the finger, and I was quite dizzy. We finished the before-takeoff checks, and soon were in tension. The cool air felt great as we launched, but it was a few minutes before my dizziness and nausea passed. As we climbed to altitude, the temperature dropped to 70 degrees. From the sauna to the snowdrift.

I now wonder what I would have done if we had lost an engine on the cat, or if we'd had a fire shortly after takeoff? Would I have been able to react? Would a sudden shot of adrenaline have done the trick? Would I have been on top of a compound emergency? I'm glad I didn't have to answer these questions. Extreme hot-weather carrier ops are the most demanding environment in carrier aviation today. Make sure you're 100 percent. 

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